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# **Compliance through Care and Commitment: Why young people do as adults ask.**

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## **Abstract**

*Although the behaviour of young people is often a focus for concern, most young people do as they are asked. This paper presents findings from a qualitative study across four educational settings which set out to explore reasons for this compliance. Forty-four young people (aged 12 – 21) participated in interactive focus groups and 21 practitioners were interviewed. We undertook a critical exploration of the authority relationships between the young people and the participating adults. The research was designed to explore the relevance of the typology of authority relationships proposed by Dennis Wrong for educational settings. The findings confirmed the applicability of his work; however, the paper argues that an additional basis for authority relationships characterised by ‘care and commitment’ should be included. The results suggest the potential for long-term caring relationships, authenticity and professional competence as key factors in enhancing compliance in educational settings.*

**Keywords:** authority, behaviour, care, relationships.

## **Introduction**

Behaviour in schools is an enduring and international concern (Munn et al., 2013). Research tends to focus on measuring levels of indiscipline (e.g. Haydn, 2014), investigating causes of indiscipline (e.g. Macleod, 2010) and on evaluating measures to prevent indiscipline (e.g. Sellman, 2009). Concern with the ‘youth of today’ outwith formal education is a similarly entrenched part of popular culture across many nation states (Furlong, 2013). Some suggest that there is a crisis in teacher authority, leading to “schools...full of children and young people who are unruly and teachers who are either not capable or not permitted to discipline such children...” (Kitchen, 2014, p.16). However, Macleod, Pirrie and MacAllister (2012) sought to turn attention to the large

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majority of student-teacher relationships where young people do as they are asked and enjoy positive, mutually respectful relationships with adults. This paper is, in part, a response to Macleod, Pirrie and MacAllister (2012), in which the potential relevance of Wrong's (2002) typology of authority relationships to student-teacher relationships was explored conceptually. Our purpose here is two-fold: to assess whether there is empirical evidence of the five bases of authority described by Wrong; and to identify any other bases of authority not covered by his framework.

Authority is a poorly understood part of what goes on in schools and has received scant attention, particularly in the UK, although it has been examined more in the US. Pace and Hemmings (2007) establish the importance of drawing on both social theory and empirical research in reaching a better understanding of authority. However, as Macleod, MacAllister and Pirrie (2012) note, they neglect possibly the most relevant contribution to the theorising of authority from social theory: the work of Dennis Wrong (2002). In doing so Pace and Hemmings (2007) exclude from analysis forms of interaction that, we argue, ought to be considered authority relationships. These omissions are a consequence of them basing their work on that of Metz (1978) who specifically excluded 'exchange, influence and coercion' from discussions of authority, choosing instead to categorise these as 'other control strategies' (Pace and Hemmings, 2007, p.8). As a result, these strategies are seen as something that the teacher does to the pupil and not as relational. The legitimacy of these strategies is revealed by including them, as Wrong (2002) does, within the scope of authority.

Because context acts as a mediating factor in determining the kinds of relationships possible, a second aim of the study was to explore the influence of context (in terms of

educational setting) on authority relationships. The findings relating to this will be reported separately, but it was this interest in the shaping influence of context that informed the research design. The research was conducted across four educational settings: a mainstream school, a school for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD), a youth project and a residential outdoor education centre. In each place the young people interviewed were between 12 and 16 years old (rising to 21 in the youth project). The research reported here was exploratory - albeit guided by theory. However, the data set is of sufficient size (21 adults; five group interviews with young people, n=44) to provide important insights that we anticipate will be of interest to practitioners, practitioner educators and others concerned with understanding pupil behaviour in education settings.

### **Theorising authority**

There are numerous ways of conceptualising authority and it is frequently elided with other forms of power relationship (such as force, persuasion and manipulation); it is also intertwined with the concepts of legitimacy and domination (Hearn, 2012). There is further potential for confusion when looking at authority in the school context as it is often invoked in discussions about behaviour management and school discipline, at times being used synonymously with both of these. It has been suggested that Wrong's typology of authority lends itself particularly well to understanding the pupil-teacher relationship (Macleod, MacAllister and Pirrie, 2012). However, in order fully to understand the potential advantages of Wrong's approach, it needs to be considered in relation to other literature on authority.

In *Power: It's Forms Bases and Uses* (2002), Wrong provided a detailed analysis of forms of power, one of which is authority. He understands authority as a relation in which compliance occurs because of some perceived feature of the power-holder, such as access to a resource, or status. Compliance is a problematic concept, particularly in education. The idea that one person follows the instructions of another without questioning the content of that instruction raises questions of moral autonomy and responsibility. Schools are engaged in a difficult balancing act between encouraging young people to think for themselves and the need for co-operative behaviour that enables the school to function (Gregory and Ripski, 2008). In this respect it is important to note that Wrong is not arguing *for* compliance; his theory is descriptive in that he identifies that compliance *does* happen and suggests explanations for this. Striving to understand the reasons why compliance does occur is not to argue that compliance is what schools ought to be aiming for in every pupil - teacher interaction. Wrong identifies five bases for authority relationship: authority by inducement; co-ercive authority; competent authority; legitimate authority and personal authority. The nuances of Wrong's typology can best be understood in the context of a review of other uses of 'authority' noting the key ways in which his understanding of the term differs from others.

Some approaches to theorising authority separate out authority over *behaviour* from authority in respect of *beliefs*, including beliefs about behaviour (Steutel and Spiecker, 2000). Alternatively, this has been expressed as a difference between authority in relation to knowledge and authority in relation to conduct (Peters, 1996), or as 'directive' and 'cognitive' authority (Allen, 1987). Steutel and Spiecker (2000) follow Raz (1986) and distinguish between 'practical' authority - being *in* authority, relating to conduct;

and ‘theoretical’ authority - being *an* authority, relating to beliefs. Wrong’s understanding of authority relates to behaviour and not to thought; his understanding of authority is as an obedience-command relationship. However, his ‘competent’ authority relies on the person issuing an order being seen as having a degree of expertise that leads the complier to do as they have been asked. Thus for Wrong, one way of being *in* authority is to be viewed as *an* authority. This capacity of Wrong’s typology to deal with the complexity of authority relationships and the range of sources of authority is one reason why it may be particularly useful in understanding the complexity and multiple bases for teacher authority.

Whilst Wrong sees authority as relational, other accounts view it as a property of an individual. For example, Steutel and Spiecker (2000) suggest that one distinction between ‘theoretical’ and ‘practical’ authority is that ‘practical’ authority can be understood in terms of a person having a ‘right to rule’. This goes beyond the right to issue instructions and includes the right to have those instructions carried out; that is, the right to receive obedience. Within the classroom setting, if we understand ‘practical’ authority as a right of all teachers to have their instructions followed, then it follows that all teachers have that right. However, we know that not all teachers’ instructions are followed; so understanding ‘practical’ authority as a right cannot be a full explanation as it does not help us to understand why some instructions from some teachers are obeyed and others are not. There must be additional factors that explain why only some teachers’ instructions are complied with. The limitation of Stuetel and Spiecker’s (2010) approach is that they see authority as something that belongs to the teacher, rather than as something that inheres in the relationship between the teacher and pupil. Wrong’s account of authority, with its focus on the way in which the person

issuing a command is perceived by the person receiving it, explains why some instructions are not followed, even when they come from a person occupying an authority position.

For Allen (1987), part of the purpose of education is to socialize children into the norms and traditions of society: teachers tell children how to behave so they will learn what kinds of citizens they ought to be. In Allen's account of what he terms 'directive authority' the teacher requires the pupil to do as she says simply because she is the teacher; this rests on the pupil being socialised into the tradition that learning and teachers are to be respected. Allen (1987) argues that it is this presumption in favour of tradition or accepted norms that allows for the existence of a free society governed by consent. Allen recognises that in reality pupils do not always respect learning and their teachers and he suggests that teachers also require personal authority or 'presence': "Yet without some degree of 'presence' a teacher will lose whatever traditional respect is directed to him. The office does not make the man: it reveals what he is." (Allen, 1987, p.22). Finally, Allen concludes that in the absence of both respect and presence, all that a teacher can fall back on are threats and sanctions. Allen's account of authority has some similarities to Wrong's account. He recognises different possible sources for a teacher's authority: those which Wrong would describe as 'legitimate', where 'authority is grounded in the consensus of the group' (Wrong, 2002, p.61) and 'personal' where compliance arises because of a desire to please. However, Allen's account is limited in that it is restricted to only these two forms. Interestingly he sees the use of sanctions (and therefore, presumably, rewards) as something to resort to if authority is absent. In contrast Wrong's account includes 'authority by inducement' and 'co-ercive

authority' in which being viewed as a person who has access to rewards and sanctions is a source of authority, rather than something to use in the absence of authority.

Another important difference among approaches to theorising authority in education is the extent to which it is seen either as a precondition for learning, or as a goal of learning. While for Allen (1987) socialisation into accepting the legitimacy of the teacher to issue commands was a desired outcome of education, for others education cannot begin unless the teacher has authority. For example, Wilson described authority as inescapable (1990), seeing it as a pre-requisite for any kind of social interaction. He identified a 'natural resistance to the whole idea of authority' (1990, p.15) that he was keen to refute, arguing that educators need "the authority and power necessary to enforce whatever discipline is required for education" (Wilson, 1990, p.32). Wilson believes it is acceptable for teachers to have control over pupils in schools if children voluntarily accept the legitimacy of the teacher to do so. There is an exchange taking place – in return for education, the pupil accepts the authority of the teacher. According to Wilson, a disciplined pupil is one who not only does as they are asked, but does so willingly, and this willing compliance necessarily precedes learning. This willing acceptance of the authority of the teacher, based on the acceptance of the right of the teacher to expect that their commands are followed, is a form of what Wrong identifies as 'legitimate authority'. Given that Wrong was concerned to present a broad account of understanding of authority, and did not see it as always deriving from the occupation of a particular social role, he is likely to have had reservations about both Allen's and Wilson's views with their emphasis on this form of authority. Wrong believed that legitimate authority was a reductionist account that emerged from an over-socialised view of people (Hearn, 2012). Hearn argues that, in part, what Wrong was attempting



to do was to rescue the individual from a dominant view of authority that had no place for ‘recalcitrant individual psychology’ (Hearn 2012, p28).

Wrong makes very few references to education, but we can speculate about what he might have said had he been asked to comment on whether authority is a precondition for, or a goal of, schooling. It is likely that Wrong would agree both with the idea that part of what goes on in schools is that pupils are socialised into accepting social norms, and with the suggestion that in order for schooling to take place at all there needs to be at least some degree of adult authority. However, his account of authority is descriptive rather than normative. In other words, his typology of authority has been developed to explain what kinds of authority relationships there *are*, not what kinds there *ought to be*. In this respect Wrong can be seen as offering a *de facto* account of authority as opposed to *de jure*. As a result, Wrong appears to offer an appropriate model to help us to understand why pupils do as teachers (or other adults) ask, rather than the separate issue of why they ought to do as they are asked.

### **Research design**

The principal aim of the study was to assess the usefulness of Wrong’s typology in seeking to understand young people’s compliance with adults’ instructions. In part its originality lies in this focus on compliance rather than disobedience. We took a qualitative approach to exploring the understandings and experiences of adults and young people in the four settings. The research team consisted of four of the five authors, each of whom had experience both of practice and research in one of the four types of provision, and a research assistant who contributed to the analysis. Whilst no claims

are made as to the representativeness of the settings, care was taken to select services known to be typical of their kind of provision, and all belonged to, or were funded by, the same large Local Government Authority.

There were advantages to the authors of being insiders in at least one setting. These included having an understanding of the culture (Bonner and Tolhurst, 2002) and starting from a baseline of knowledge which it would take an ‘outsider’ a long time to accumulate (Smyth and Holian, 2008). However, being an insider comes with its own challenges; van Heugten (2004) stresses the importance of avoiding dominant discourse blind spots and notes that research of this type is open to accusations of bias and subjectivity. In order to minimise such bias but still benefit from the insider advantages, we visited each of the four settings in different insider/outsider pair combinations, with each person conducting data collection in 2 of the 4 settings. Preliminary analysis began over breaks and on journeys home with the person in the role of ‘outsider’ making the familiar strange (Mannay, 2010) for the insider.

All participants in the study were issued with information sheets, of which there were three versions: adult, parent, and young person. Written consent was gained from all participants. Individual interviews with adults were structured around a topic guide, and were digitally recorded and transcribed. We interviewed adult practitioners who were at least 5 years post qualification. This was to make it more likely that they would be established and secure in their roles and past the early-career stage of negotiating, developing and practising enacting authority. In the two schools we interviewed a range of subject specialists from the traditional academic (Maths and English) to

vocational/practical (Painting and Decorating, Design and Technology). We achieved a balance of male and female adult participants.

The topic guide used to structure the interviews with adults included questions designed to elicit their views on:

- their relationships with young people in their settings;
- any perceived impact of institutional ethos on authority relationships with young people;
- the basis for their expectation that young people would comply with directions

The guide included these headings of areas of enquiry, thus ensuring the same issues were probed in each setting, but it also afforded the flexibility for each interviewer to ask follow-up questions appropriate to the particular context.

In each setting we invited 6 – 8 young people to participate in activities designed to elicit their understandings and experiences of authority relationships. We aimed for a balance of young men and young women, but this was not possible in the SEBD school and youth project because a large majority of young people accessing these services were young men. Actual numbers participating in each group varied and is recorded in Table 1. Two researchers were involved in the group activities; one in the leading role and the other who was more focused on note-taking. The activities had low literacy demands, but produced some written materials (e.g. comments on ‘sticky notes’). The use of participatory activities with young people has been shown to stimulate their involvement and encourage participation (Gillies & Robinson, 2012). The focus of enquiry was on understanding on what basis young people comply with directions from

adults. Formal notes were complemented by photographic records of the outcomes of some of the activities (e.g. pyramid ranking of ‘sticky notes’ on a flip-chart).

Table 1: Participants in each setting

	<b>Outdoor Centre</b>	<b>SEBD school</b>	<b>Mainstream School</b>	<b>Youth Project</b>
<b>Adults</b>	Head of Centre Deputy Head of Centre 2 Instructors 1 group of 3 visiting Teachers	Head of Family Support 3 Class Teachers 2 Behaviour Support assistants	4 Teachers	Manager Deputy Manager Project worker Youth worker
<b>Young People</b>	6, mixed, age 15 and 16.	8 young men, age 12–16 2 young women, age 15	8, mixed, age 13 and 14	20, mixed, age 12–20
<b>TOTAL</b>	7 adults 6 young people	6 adults 10 young people	4 adults 8 young people	4 adults 20 young people

We took an iterative approach to thematic analysis. Regular meetings were held as the data collection was ongoing, in which emerging themes were discussed and similarities and differences across the settings were highlighted. All interviews were transcribed and transcripts were shared among the team. A traditional pen and paper, constant comparative approach (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was adopted. A preliminary coding grid was devised based on the research questions and informed by the literature. Each team member took the same set of 4 transcripts and coded them independently. Individual codings were then compared and the coding framework was adapted through discussions. Subsequent ‘sweeps’ through the data focused on identifying any themes that were not predicted by the review of the literature. Once a final coding framework was agreed the remaining transcripts were allocated, with each person taking the lead

on analysis of interviews from ‘their’ setting. The audio recordings of two of the group interviews with young people were good enough for transcription. Analysis of these transcripts and other materials generated by the activities followed a similar process to that of adult interviews.

During team meetings emerging understandings were discussed to test if we were arriving at the same interpretations of the interview data. Where data did not fit the developing interpretations either these were revisited or reasons for possible exceptions were discussed. A final, but important part of the analysis were the frequent email exchanges between all the researchers which captured nascent ideas about what the data were telling us.

## **Findings**

The five bases of authority relationship described by Wrong (2002) were present in our data from both adults and young people. These did not exist in neat discrete categories. Rather, as predicted by Allen (1987) and Wrong (2002), we found authority relationships to be multifaceted, with different forms of authority bound up together. As expected, different kinds of authority relationships were described across the settings, with personal authority least common in the mainstream school. The importance of context (particularly in terms of purpose and professional identity), in shaping possible relationships, came through strongly in all four settings. There was obvious discomfort amongst some adults in the SEBD school and youth project talking about themselves as being ‘in authority’. Indeed, practitioners in all three non-

mainstream settings were keen to distance themselves from the kinds of authority they imagined mainstream teachers to enact.

### ***Five bases of authority***

(i) *Co-ercive authority* and (ii) *authority by inducement*, understood as rewards and sanctions, were described by adults in all four of the settings. They also featured significantly in young people's discussions of life in mainstream school. Despite their pervasiveness, adults tended to use them as a starting-point, one that established a working environment in which other, by implication 'better', bases for authority relationships could be developed.

A mainstream secondary teacher described his approach as:

*'...very early on setting clear guidelines and clear boundaries about expected behaviour... I think once that is established, the rest of the relationship becomes much easier ... they know 'if I muck about here I am going to get into bother' ... it is a lot easier to have an easier going relationship once the pupils know what is and what isn't acceptable. [Teacher 1, mainstream school]*

All of the adults in the two school settings saw inducement and co-ercion as part of their repertoire of authority relationships, rather than something to resort to in the absence of authority as suggested by Allen (1987). However the attitude towards these forms of authority relationships was very different in the SEBD school where a teacher said that the threat of consequences did work, but this was only after the relationship was already established:

*With our kids you have to do the carrot before you do the stick. So generally what works better is ... yes, there are sanctions, there is detention, there is removing them from class, there is shouting at them, there is the 'waggy finger', but none of that has had any impact unless they have seen the nicer side of you.* [Teacher 1, SEBD school]

This is consistent with what the boys' group in the same school told us when they were describing mainstream teachers. While they recognised adults using this approach, they were quite dismissive of it:

*'strict, shouty, telling you what to dae, they shout at you, they demand it mair, mair punishments ...I'm mair likely to do what they tell you if they're no strict'.* [Pupil Group 1, SEBD school]

The different view of coercive authority in the SEBD school may reflect the troubled educational histories of the young people. Our limited data suggest that where people in authority positions have been experienced as not deserving that position, then others occupying the same role will have to approach establishing their authority in alternative ways.

In summary, the ability to issue punishments and rewards was recognised as a form of authority by all participants; however, relying solely on this form of authority could lead to a lack of compliance from some pupils.

(iii) Where *legitimate authority* was mentioned, it was often seen as something that some adults might try to enact, but which was doomed to failure, again particularly with young people who had prior negative experiences of schooling:

*But yes they [the pupils] do arrive here different to mainstream pupils in terms of ... there isn't that automatic 'you are an adult I have to listen to you' thing. It is 'you are an adult and you are like all the bloody rest who did that to me, or didn't do what I needed' ...* [Head of Family services, SEBD school]

The mainstream pupils attending the outdoor centre described, disparagingly, some of their teachers at school deliberately putting on an act of being strict, scary and distant. It may be that these teachers are 'performing' strict teacher, perhaps in an attempt to enact legitimate authority. By acting like a strict teacher they may be hoping to benefit from being seen as occupying the teacher role. Adults from the SEBD school also recognised this approach, and were similarly disdainful of it, for example:

*I think if I go out and go 'I am an authority figure' or 'I am going to act like an authority figure' or 'I am going to assert my authority' I think that is the shortest possible route to not having any authority.* [Head of Family services, SEBD school]

A different perspective was offered by the manager of the youth project:

*The most essential thing is to have authority .... You have to believe in it. So if you don't understand the legitimacy of your own authority and you can't project that and you are uncertain about 'why I have got this responsibility? Or should I really have it?' you can't expect other people to follow your lead. Both other staff but also the kids, to*



*read off you that you are confident. That your role is legitimate.* [Deputy Manager, Youth Project]

Similarly a guidance teacher in the SEBD school, echoing Allen (1987), talked about part of her responsibility as being to help the pupils become socialised into accepting the legitimacy of the role of the teacher:

*I am not saying they don't see me as an authority figure. They have to. That is society.*  
[Teacher 3, SEBD school]

This embracing of legitimate authority by the youth project deputy manager and guidance teacher at the SEBD school runs somewhat counter to the view expressed by other adults. This difference can, perhaps, be explained in terms of how respondents understand what performance of occupying an authority position looks like. Those dismissive of it talk in terms of attempts to impose and assume control (something Wrong (2002) considers as different from authority). In contrast the SEBD guidance teacher and deputy manager of the youth project understand it as relational, seeing the need to be recognised as being legitimately in that position.

(iv) Only two adult interviewees mentioned *competent authority*: one was the head of the Outdoor Education centre, who said '*I think we are seen as experts. The key to the adventure*', and the other was a teacher of a technical subject in the mainstream school. No other adult interviewee described holding, or believing that they ought to hold, authority by virtue of their disciplinary knowledge or expertise.

For the young people, responding to competent authority was most obvious in the outdoor setting where this was the dominant form of authority mentioned. Safety was a major concern for these pupils who were well out of their 'comfort zone'. However, there were hints of it in other settings. The young people at the youth project said they did what adults there asked them 'because they're smart'; the pupils at the outdoor centre mentioned subject knowledge as something they responded positively to in mainstream school; and the pupils in the mainstream group, when asked what teacher characteristics would make them likely to comply with a request, mentioned teachers who 'could pitch lessons appropriately', implying pedagogical, if not disciplinary, expertise.

(v) For the young people across all four settings it was clear that *personal authority* was what they responded to and were most comfortable with. This was expressed as being more likely to do what they were told by adults who 'respect you' (all settings); 'are kind' (mainstream and youth project); 'you can have some banter with' (outdoor, mainstream and SEBD) 'are nice to be around', 'can talk to you', (mainstream); are 'friends', 'fun' and 'sound' (youth project); are 'nice to you', (SEBD school); and 'treat you like a normal person' and 'understand you' (pupils at outdoor centre talking about their mainstream teachers). The importance of mutual respect and the possibility of humour were also key to the adults' descriptions of the relationships in which they felt they held authority in the eyes of the young people.

Adults in the non-mainstream settings talked a lot about using personal authority. Some explicitly distanced their own practice from that of mainstream teachers and suggested that constraints within mainstream schools get in the way of the development of positive

relationships. This view was endorsed by one of the three mainstream teachers accompanying their pupils to the Outdoor Education centre who remarked:

*When we are in that environment [mainstream] with all the added pressure and stress of school is on top of us, then that sort of puts that barrier up I suppose, with certain children... in school there is so many different things going on, behaviour and all their different subjects, and peer pressure from the people that they are with, that this environment is totally different. [Mainstream Teacher at Outdoor Centre]*

Other adults suggested that different degrees of formality in mainstream put up barriers:

*As youth workers they don't really see us the same as they would a teacher in school because they don't have to use the formal 'miss' this or 'sir'. [Youth Worker, Youth Project]*

In contrast, for an outdoor instructor it was not the setting that made the difference, but the kinds of people who worked there:

*...we are a bit closer in age I guess we have an understanding of what is happening in their lives. Everyone dresses a bit cooler. [Instructor 1, Outdoor Centre]*

It might, therefore, come as a surprise to those working in alternative and informal settings that the mainstream teachers talked in very similar terms about the kinds of relationships they tried to establish with their pupils:

*You can get far, far more from pupils if there is a good relationship working between you and if there is .... If there is respect between the pupil and the teacher and a good relationship, then undoubtedly you get a lot more about the pupils.* [Teacher 2, mainstream school]

Our data suggest that for the adults working in the SEBD school, outdoor centre and youth work, at least part of their professional identity is constructed in opposition to the imagined identity of teachers in mainstream schools. If this were replicated in a larger study, we might ask whether this matters for the young people who are engaged across a range of education settings. Previous research suggests there is potential for professional identities to get in the way of joined-up, multi-disciplinary approaches to working (e.g. Hudson, 2002).

In addition to support for the existence of Wrong's five bases of authority across different education settings, our data suggest the existence of a further basis for authority that we have identified as 'authority of care and commitment'. This was particularly, but not exclusively, evident in the youth project and SEBD school. This is a key finding of the study. We describe below how this is similar to, but different from, personal and competent authority, and how it relates to the theme of 'trust' which also came through strongly in our data.

### ***Care and Commitment: Expanding Wrong's Typology***

This additional basis of authority can be understood as drawing on both competent and personal authority but is different enough, and was sufficiently present in our data, to warrant its own category. In our data it is evident where one person does as another

asks because they believe that the person doing the asking both knows what is in their best interests *and* cares about them. In many cases it is described as persisting over time, with young people sensing that adults care about what happens to them in the future when they are long gone from their current situation. For example, in the context of the youth project this long-term aspect of the relationship is cemented in the community through generational engagement with local families.

The young people at the youth project said they did what the adults asked them '*because we've known them for years*', and the manager highlighted the importance of the centre as a holder of local memories:

*... a guy who I knew when I first came here in 1995.... He came in here after a funeral recently, and he sat and had a cup of tea and he asked if he could look through the old photographs and there was photos of him and his pals at a beach and the guy was getting quite emotional about it. And it turned out that the woman's funeral he had been at, the reason he had come in was to see if he could find a couple of photies of her for her sister. Because the family had nae photies. That is mental eh. A place like this.*  
[Youth Project, Manger]

We found evidence of practitioners reporting care and commitment as a basis for their authority mostly, although not exclusively, in the youth project and SEBD settings.

*At the end of the day, they might never want to do any work but you cannae just say 'piss off' and you find that you let them see that you care, and show them 'it is all about you, not about me here, when you leave the school you want to have a future, get a job.*

*This qualification will help you. Do you want to sell the big issue<sup>†</sup>?*’ [Teacher 2, SEBD school]

The boys’ group in the SEBD school talked about teachers who had their ‘*best interests at heart*’ and they understood that these teachers were telling them to do things to improve their chances after school: ‘*we have to knuckle down with our work, we’re at that stage now*’. It is therefore similar in some respects to the kind of authority between a parent and a child, but it is different in that whilst a parent can be understood as having an obligation to care for a child<sup>‡</sup>, a common way in which young people identify this kind of authority is when an adult goes beyond what they are contractually required to do. It would be difficult to overestimate how important this seemed to be to all of the young people. The recognition of adults giving up their own time appeared to make a big difference to how they were viewed. One young woman in the SEBD school told us that a teacher had taken her knitting home over the weekend to fix some mistakes, and this clearly had made a lasting impression. Similarly, the young people attending the outdoor education centre were surprised and touched to discover that their teachers were not being paid extra for accompanying them.

With the addition of care and commitment there are six bases of authority, and across these six almost every adult we interviewed talked about the importance of trust in the relationships between themselves and the young people. Trust was seen as something that underpinned relationships and developed over time:

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<sup>†</sup> The Big Issue is a magazine published on behalf of and sold by homeless or vulnerably housed people

<sup>‡</sup> Although see Baier (1995) for an alternative reading of parental obligation.

*I think for me building rapport starts with a foundation of trust. [Teacher 3, mainstream]*

*The relationship between the instructor, me, and the children, then becomes the critical part of it and it is the trust relationship and it is building the trust. [Deputy Head, Outdoor Centre]*

In the following section we explore the complex relationship between ‘authority’, ‘trust’ and ‘care’ in more detail.

## **Discussion**

This research was carried out to explore compliance across different settings and whether Wrong’s typology of authority had validity. Significantly, we found that there were authority relationships that were not fully accounted for by Wrong’s typology. Our findings suggest that the framework needs to be extended to accommodate ‘care and commitment’ as a basis for authority. Whilst it would be possible to describe this as an extended form of personal authority, we have chosen to describe it as distinct because the things mentioned by participants were qualitatively different from the characteristics of a more general personal authority relationship, such as respect. Furthermore, it is possible to command personal authority whilst simultaneously paying little regard to the expressions of ‘care and commitment’ so readily observed from our data. It may be that this emerged as an important feature of the inter-personal relationships in our study because of the nature of the settings in which we generated data. It is possible that young people who have encountered difficulties in school,

particularly in relation to accepting authority, as was the case for the young people in three out of the four settings we visited, may be more likely to focus on this aspect of authority. As the adults in the SEBD school and youth work project reminded us, these are young people whose prior experience of adults in authority positions is often very negative. This might explain the importance to them of the consistency of the expression of care over extended time. In the mainstream settings this form of authority did not emerge as so significant, although it was present in how pupils talked about responding to adults who went beyond their basic obligations.

Caring relationships have long been seen as central in the informal education sector, although an unwelcome shift towards a more technical and managerial focus has been identified (Slovenjo & Thomdson, 2016). However, the relatively recent influence of social pedagogy in UK children's residential services (Eichsteller & Holhoff, 2012), and the well established practice in youth work (Ingram & Harris, 2013), provides a renewed focus on the importance of young people feeling cared for as a first step in developing the capacity for them to build positive relationships. The presence of care in our data therefore comes as no surprise; what is new is our suggestion that feeling cared for is related to compliance.

There has of course been much written about the qualities of a positive teacher/pupil relationship (e.g. Hutchings et al., 2008; Sellman, 2009) and our findings do not contradict any of these previous accounts. There is also growing interest in the pedagogy of relation (e.g. Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004; Aultman, Williams-Johnson, & Schutz, 2009), which frequently refers back to writing on Ethics of Care, and its relevance to education, by Noddings (e.g. 1984, 2005, 2010). Noddings (2010)



characterizes caring as involving three key elements: the attention of the carer which enables the carer to understand the needs of the cared for; the motivation to want to do something about those needs; and the person being cared for must recognize the actions of the carer as caring. Noddings suggests that these caring relationships “form the foundation for successful pedagogical activity” (Noddings, 2005, p.1). Indeed, for Noddings, relationships form the basis of being, and this ‘relational ontology’ underpins the subsequent development of a ‘relational ethic’. This Ethics of Care has been criticized for, amongst other things, being too local (and hence politically powerless) and for positioning women as naturally belonging in caring roles (Diller, 1996). It has also been argued that it cannot stand alone as other moral values are required to take account of ‘undesirable caring relations’ (Houston, 1990, p. 118). Finally, the basis of Noddings’ work in a relational ontology is problematic for some. In this view it is relationships that are said to constitute reality rather than individuals and social structures. Relational ontology is associated with the New York School in the 1990s (Mische, 2011), and particularly with the work of Emirbayer (1997). This approach sees social structures, if they exist at all, as being simply the effect of relations between individuals and has been criticized for the exclusion of social structures as having any causal link to action (Dépelteau, 2008).

Despite these challenges to the idea of care as the basis of an ethical approach, the importance of caring relationships within education has received much wider support (e.g. O’Connor, 2008; Laletas & Reupert, 2015). However, the development of caring relationships has been seen as leading to challenges for teachers in negotiating the boundaries between teacher and pupil. For example, there may be cases where a policy advocates one course of action, but a caring approach suggests another (Aultman et al.,

2009). Here caring is understood as in tension with control; the reciprocity and openness of caring relationships undermining established traditional patterns of authority relationships. However our findings suggest that rather than undermining authority, caring relationships are one of the ways in which compliance in educational settings can be understood.

This is not the first study to identify the importance of care within authority relationships. Previous studies (eg. Gregory & Ripski, 2008) have suggested that care is something which supplements other bases of authority. In a study of pupils' experiences of teachers in primary classrooms in Egypt, Hargreaves, Elhawary and Mahgoub write "For these pupils the teacher's authority seemed to be actually legitimised by their genuine 'ethic of care' for them" (2017, p. 13). However, we argue that our data suggest that care and commitment can be more accurately seen as a form of authority in its own right. The relationship between authority and care is complicated but the work of Baier on Trust (1995) is helpful in unpacking the complexity.

Baier is a moral philosopher writing broadly in the tradition of the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers such as David Hume and Adam Smith who were concerned to identify the source of moral beliefs in human nature rather than in a religious authority (Hearn, 2016). This concern to identify the source of moral beliefs leads Baier to insist that moral theories must be able to account for the moral development of the next generation (care work traditionally associated with women). She proposes that the concept of 'trust' can be used to bring together traditional (male) moral theories which focus on ideas of obligation and contract, with more recent writing from (mostly) female philosophers which emphasise the importance of love and care in moral

reasoning. She writes that she hopes trust can “mediate between reason and feeling” (1995, p. 10) and argues against the view that responsibility and care are optional extras that can supplement ideas of justice and rights, but are not essential to them. This is in contrast to Adam Smith, who argued that justice was the cornerstone of social functioning, and that while what he described as ‘optional beneficence’ is naturally occurring and to be welcome, on its own (and unlike justice) it is not enough to allow society to function (Smith, 1984 [1759]).

Baier argues that the concept of trust is inextricably linked with both care and power. For her, A trusts B with something of value (C) when A has trusted B with the care of C, and this involves giving B of some discretionary powers over C (Baier, 1995). Where the something of value ‘C’ is a person, including oneself, the idea of giving ‘discretionary powers’, or as Gambetta (1988, p. 223) would have it, reaching a level of trust “which is effective for action yielding potential cooperation”, implies entering in to an authority relationship. I do as I am asked because I have trusted myself/ my education to this person. Baier (1995), in line with Gambetta’s (1988) observation that more trust is not necessarily better for society, argues that placing trust in authority is not in itself morally virtuous, that the person doing the trusting ought to retain some discernment. While this might look inconsistent with Wrong’s views on authority (in which the content of any order is irrelevant) it is important to remember that Wrong and Baier are doing different things, Baier is advancing a normative theory whereas Wrong’s work is descriptive.

Why then are we not arguing that trust is a form of authority? We suggest that trust, in a general sense, is implicit in all authority relationships. This is easily understood in

relation to most bases of authority – e.g. I trust that my doctor has passed all the necessary medical training to practise. It is perhaps more counter-intuitive to talk about trust as part of co-ercive authority. However, when we assert that a pupil is responding to the co-ercive authority of a teacher, we are saying that they trust that the teacher has access to the sanctions that they claim. Trust is part of all authority relationships in this simple sense that the person complying does so because they trust that the ‘power-holder’ has the access to the resource, or status, or characteristics that they appear to. To reduce authority to trust would be to miss the different things in which people place their trust. It is these different perceived features of the power-holder that form the different bases of authority.

If we accept that all recognition of authority implies trust that the authority has the characteristic that it claims to, and follow Baier in seeing all trust as involving care, then it follows that all authority involves care. In addition, Hargreaves, Elhawary and Mahgoub (2017) demonstrate that when pupils feel they are cared for this supports other bases of authority. Acceptance of these points does not, however, negate the possibility of care and commitment also existing as a distinctive basis for authority. While others have interpreted the care and commitment pupils experience, or that teachers enact, as an ‘optional beneficence’, our evidence, albeit limited, suggests that being recognised as someone who cares and is committed, particularly by young people who have a history of rejecting other kinds of authority, is sufficient on its own to establish authority.

In relation to other bases of authority, Wrong’s approach is helpful in understanding why legitimate authority is not enough to explain compliance. Versions of authority that say a teacher (or someone in a similar role) holds authority because it is legitimate for them to do so do not help us understand why not all teachers are responded to in the

same way. Wrong's relational understanding of authority helps us to see that it is not enough for an adult to occupy a particular role, sanctioned by social convention to issue commands, but that they also need to be viewed as legitimately occupying that role by young people. Our findings show that young people are extremely sceptical of what they see as performance by adults (in the sense of someone acting the role of teacher, rather than occupying the role in an authentic way), and they do not trust the legitimacy of such a person. The authentic embracing of one's legitimate authority (described by the head of the youth centre) is likely to be better received by young people than the acting as if you have authority (described by Teacher 2 from the SEBD school). This raises questions for how initial teacher education might support the development of more authentic embodiment of legitimate authority.

As noted earlier a distinction is often made in the literature between being 'in authority' and being 'an authority' (e.g. Peters, 1996). What Wrong's typology surfaces is the possible connection between these two through his account of competent authority. An interesting finding from our research is that young people were more likely to talk about responding to competent authority than the adults were to describe enacting it. Macleod, MacAllister and Pirrie (2012) suggested that there may be challenges to the competent authority of teachers as curriculum changes have been alleged to undermine the importance of the core disciplines. Similarly, Kitchen (2013) has suggested that there is a crisis in education with teachers no longer being seen as authorities, as a result of what he calls an "onslaught of progressivism" (p. 41). He describes an 'anti-knowledge campaign', said to be a consequence of the speed of change and the rate at which knowledge becomes obsolete. Our findings suggest that teachers do not have to worry too much in this regard. The young people in both school settings described responding

positively to requests from adults who are clever, have a good knowledge of their subject and, following Peters (1996), who have a sound understanding of the science of teaching.

## **Conclusion**

Macleod, MacAllister and Pirrie (2012) suggested that Wrong offered a way of thinking about authority that is relevant to educational settings. The research reported here confirms that, with the important addition of ‘authority of care and commitment’, this is indeed the case. Having established an understanding of the mechanisms underlying compliance this conceptual framework can now be used to investigate situations in which compliance does not occur, and to develop interventions that will maximise the possibilities of particular authority relationship being enacted. For example, our findings reveal that young people respond to competent authority more than adults imagine they do. This suggests that student teachers ought to be encouraged to consider the ways in which their disciplinary and pedagogical expertise can be translated into authority, alongside more traditional training in behaviour management techniques. Where young people have a troubled history in education, our findings suggest that the authority of care and commitment may be particularly important.

In addition to confirming the applicability of the typology, this research also demonstrated its usefulness by identifying questions that have surfaced through analysis of the data using Wrong’s conceptual lens. One worthy of further investigation is the extent to which there is a divide between mainstream schools and other settings. This is both in terms of how those working in other settings perceive mainstream teachers, and how the structures and routines of mainstream school are felt to limit the

kinds of authority relationships possible. Our findings suggest that part of the identity of youth workers, outdoor instructors and SEBD teachers is that they're 'not like mainstream teachers'. If this is borne out by further research then there is work to be done with educational professionals across the formal, informal and non-formal sectors to generate better understanding of different professional roles in order to facilitate positive inter-disciplinary relationships.

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